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AN OPEN LETTER ON The WRITERS OF GOLDEN HOURS

by Willis E. Hurd

My dear Cummings:

Your April issue of THE ROUND-UP contains a carefully tucked away little suggestion that I write an article on Golden Hours. You know, Ralph, that I'd be delighted to accomodate you if I could, but I have no historical references that would enable me to do anything like a satisfactory stunt of that sort. My files of Golden Hours are scattered, and my personal scrapbook, in which is to be found an assortment of clippings relating to my connections with the issues from 1899 to 1902 are unfortunately historical only as they relate to me and not to the story paper. If you want a real article on Golden Hours, giving a history of its development under Editor John R. Abarbanell, down through the years when it became a color-cover weekly sometime in 1900, later had a change of editor as its fortunes diminished, and finally disappeared as an adult monthly somewhere about 1905, go to Raymond L. Caldwell. Perhaps, if he is not too busy putting in some 16 hours a day at his florist's office, he may be able to give you a choice summary of facts. All I can possibly do is to give you a few reminiscences. If you care for those, you may publish what you please from the random paragraphs I am jotting down in this letter. But I warn you that this must not be considered as an historical article.

I first heard of Golden Hours as an amateur journalist in 1898, and one of the very interesting items regard-

ing it was that Editor Abarbanell was offering \$5 each for acceptable short stories of adventure from amateur writers. That excited me, for I had an urge in that direction. So one afternoon, back in Newport, N. H., I spent a few wildly interesting hours in writing "Endangered by a Sacred Elephant." Imagine my delight when I received \$5 for my yarn, and my still greater delight when I saw it printed in the issue of February 18, 1899. I could scarcely contain myself, and so proceeded to write "Through a Forest of Perils," which I submitted professionally. The editor sent me a check for it and was pleased to inform me that with it I could enter the ranks as a full fledged professional journalist. After that I could hardly be contained. I deluged Abarbanell with short stories, even stooping to the rather unethical trick of signing some of them with an assumed name in the foolish hope that under different names, more of them might be published. The editor kindly took the crop of tales I offered, but advised me not to make use of pen names and not to send him too many stories as other writers of "shorts" had to be considered.

One day Abarbanell wrote me that John De Morgan was at Lake Placid in the Adirondacks in search of local color for a new serial in which the writers for Golden Hours were to be the characters. He said that I was invited to become one of those characters, and that as each author was supposed to tell a campfire yarn of an evening before the Club, he requested me to prepare for him a 300-word tale as my contribution. You may well believe, Ralph, that I wrote

that skit in a hurry and that it was accepted to become a part of De Morgan's full book-length novel. In a few days I had a note from De Morgan himself, with an inclosure of a piece of birchbark, duly inscribed, from the shores of Lake Placid. I almost felt at that moment that, as a short story writer for *Golden Hours* and a coming character in a novel by John De Morgan, I had really become a dime novelist.

De Morgan must have been an extremely interesting character. All that I could learn about him, however, was extremely little. Originally from England, he had written some parodies on H. Ryder Haggard, quaint farcical tales, of which I have only one, "King Solomon's Wives," which appears in the Seaside Library Pocket Edition, No. 970, Aug. 9, 1886. The other two Seaside tales were "King Solomon's Treasure" and "He." These yarns, which ludicrously parodied Ryder Haggard's "King Solomon's Mines" and "She," were not well received in England, it appears, and so the author, who wrote under the sobriquet of Hyder Ragged, came to New York to try his hand at different sorts of novels, historical and fanciful. He joined the staff of *Golden Hours*, in which his first tale, "The Brave Young Soldier," appeared with the issue of June 2, 1888, under his real name. Around 1899 or 1900, according to a letter I had from him in addition to his writing, he was a tax collector for one of New York's boroughs.

Well, the great *Golden Hours* serial, "Golden Hours Camping Out Club in the Adirondacks," opened with the issue of July 21, 1900. It bore the subtitle of "Writers on a Racket." In the initial chapter, "How the Club was organized," we find De Morgan, Cornelius Shea, and Harry Irving Hancock grumbling about New York's slushy March weather. Shea it seems had begun his writing for *Golden Hours* on January 12, 1889, with a serial, "The Three Islands; or, The Mystery and Her Crew." Hancock appeared on May 4, 1889, with "The Young Reporter." With the exception of "Fred," the author of the "infamous" "Bones" yarns, who joined the staff on June 9, 1888, those three appear to have been the "oldest *Golden Hours*" writers.

"Bones" and his author always intrigued me. As "Fred" I supposed him

to have been likewise that Fred J. Thorpe who contributed so profusely to the Norman L. Munro publication. Later, quite by accident, I learned an amazing fact about "Fred." It seems that his father was Albert J. Stearns, author of the famous juveniles, "Sindbad, Smith & Co." and "Chris and the Wonderful Lamp." The elder Stearns originated the "Bones" tales, and upon his death, they were continued by his son, Edgar Franklin Stearns, the "Edgar Franklin" of so many *Argosy* novels. Many years later I wrote to Stearns about his connection with the "Bones" tales, and in his reply, while admitting the relationship, he asked me how I had learned of it, since he supposed not to exceed two persons in the entire universe were aware that he was the author of that amazing series of comics. Absolutely, I could not tell him how I had imagined or found it out myself. Stearns told me that he had a great quantity of original "Bones" drawings in a storeroom, and that if he ever got to cleaning out the place, he would send me some samples for my curiosity collection. But I never heard from him thereafter. He embarked in scenario writing, and so far as I am concerned, he utterly disappeared.

With this diversion in some rather disconnected reminiscences, I can return to the "Golden Hours Camping Out Club." The serial ran through ten issues, concluding with that of No. 660, September 22, 1900. I waited in a state of little suppressed excitement for the issue that was to introduce me into the scene. All the serial writers had early been introduced — Weldon J. Cobb, Mike Donovan, Matt Royal, S. A. D. Cox, Frank J. Earll, Charles H. Day, and other familiar names, besides the others previously mentioned. Among the short story writers receiving invitations to join the Club, I found my name mentioned with such well-known names as Will Lisenbee, T. C. Harbaugh, George W. Browne, Victor St. Clair, W. Bert Foster, and others. I never could quite figure out why George Waldo Browne and Victor S. Clair were mentioned as separate writers unless it was because in those days it may not have been generally known that St. Clair was only a pseudonym for Browne. I knew Browne well, and on several occasions had visited him

at his home in Manchester, N. H., and had been presented with several of his books, autographed under his own name or that of Victor St. Clair, depending upon the name given in the book. In 1902, by the way, when Golden Hours began publishing biographies of its various writers in Golden Hours Junior, I had the pleasure of writing the sketch relating to Victor St. Clair and the even greater pleasure of seeing my own biographical sketch appear in print under the authorship of Victor St. Clair.

I was introduced into the De Morgan serial in the issue of September 8, 1900. In Chapter XXV, Hancock had just finished telling his campfire yarn about an experience in the Philippines and had just asked for a match with which to light his pipe, when, as the serial now went on to say, and I quote from De Morgan's words:

"Hancock had scarcely finished his story, which had roused us out of our lethargy and made life seem worth living once more, when Grant touched me on the arm and whispered in a tragic voice which would have been a credit to one of Cobb's heroes:

"We are discovered!"

"I looked across the clearing and saw something which made my face flush. We were all in 'undress uniform,' Hancock said, for we had outing shirts and had dispensed with collars and cuffs. We must have looked like a Bohemian crowd as we sat or lolled on the grass smoking and listening to Hancock's story. Right in front of us was a well-groomed, neatly dressed young man, with high collar and up-to-date scarf. He looked as though he had just left Broadway, and was dressed 'to kill.' He was looking at us through a field glass, which hid his face somewhat, but we saw that his upper lip was adorned with a dainty and silky moustache.

"He had as much right there as we had, but we rather resented the intrusion. We were not dressed to receive company and the contrast was not pleasing.

"He was turning away, much to our relief, when Donovan suddenly rose up from his recumbent position. The young man shouted

"Hurrah, what's the matter with GOLDEN HOURS?"

"He stepped up to us and looked us all over. Then he came up to me, and, putting out his hand, said:

"'You are John De Morgan, are you not?'

"'Yes, but you have the advantage of me; I do not know—'

"'What, do you not recognize this moustache? I thought when George D'Vys immortalized it in his poem all the world would recognize me.'

"'You are not—'

"'Yes, I am, this moustache belongs to Willis Edwin Hurd, at your service. I say, is not this glorious. I discovered you by accident. I thought you were up Paul Smith's way.'

"'How did you know us?'

"'I should have gone away, for I was not sure of your identity until I saw those magic letters on the sweater, "G. H.;" then I said, "That's Mike Donovan," and I looked again and knew De Morgan from his portraits.'

"'We are real glad to see you.' Hancock said, in New England fashion, with a regular Massachusetts twang.

"'I am glad I came this way.'

"'Where are you staying?'

"'Just here at this moment. I have no abiding city, as the poet says. I am alone, wandering where I please.'

"'Join us.'

"'Do you mean it?'

"'Of course I do; we all mean it, don't we?'

"'Yes, Willis Edwin Hurd is very welcome,' Hancock replied rather pompously, 'only—'

"'What? Don't say that I may not stay.'

"'You will have to take off that high collar and become one of us.'

"'May I? It will be glorious fun. I hate collars, only in Newport, you know—but D'Vys wrote a poem on my collars, so you know all about them.'

In that manner, Ralph, was I introduced into the select society of the Golden Hours Camping Out Club—I, the country boy who did hate collars in reality. The whole story was a fanciful tale, for the gathering and the incidents were framed by the splendid author. The George D'Vys mentioned was another of my old literary friends, the author of "Casey at the Bat," who in truth once wrote a humorous letter which was published in Golden Hours. In it he asserted that he had written a poem about Hurd's moustache, that famous little hard-wire brush of red that I sported for a year or two, and not the silky affair alluded to by De Morgan.

My final story contributed to Gold-

en Hours as a boys' story paper bore the title, "Hancock's Filipino Cannon." I got my five dollars for it, but in the subsequent change of editors, the manuscript was lost and never published. The last check received by me from Norman L. Munro for a manuscript was in 1905 when the adult Golden Hours bought of me, not a story of wild adventure, but a LOVE story, "The Triumph in Defeat." What a comedown that was from real blood and thunder and bones to slush and tender romance!

Golly, I'd like to see a Golden Hours rise again. I'd like to do some of the oldtime stuff for it. But that of course is but a mere yearning for that "sub-literary past," of Fred T. Singleton. Now that I am writing scientific material for Government publications, I still can't help my old-fashioned healthy hankering for a renewed dab at writing tales such as I used to do when I told of "The Downfall of Mandarin To," "The Black Jaquar," etc., for Golden Hours.

Here, then, is your "article," Ralph, and I hope you may care to publish it. At least it has the justification that it was written by one who in a way was associated with what may be called the dime novel in its later days. If you do not care for the Manuscript, won't you please return it for my curiosity files?

NEWSY NEWS

by Ralph F. Cummings

Ralph Smith says he had a nice visit with his son Wallace, who is at the Marine Naval Base at Jacksonville, Florida. Ralph wanted to visit a lot of the members down that way, but after riding for 35 hours without even moving from his seat, I know you all will excuse him. His son could not come home before being shipped across the pond, so Ralph hopped the State of Maine Express, and was lucky to get a seat. He said the trains were crowded, dirty cars, full of smoke and the aisles filled with people. Not much fun squeezed in one spot for over 35 hours. No sleeper, just sitting there. No dining car service, lived off sandwiches and milk they sold from time to time. Trains 5 to 6 hours late and just as bad coming back as going. Altogether Ralph was on the train over 70 hours, and his

pan is sore yet, so fellows, please excuse him this trip. Friday morning to Monday Morning April 16th to 19th to complete the trip, and waited two hours to see his son. As a fellow says, it's all in a life time.

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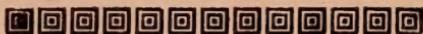
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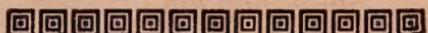
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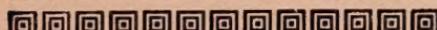
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